

Amendments to the Specification:

Please replace paragraph [0020] with the following amended paragraph:

[0020] (b) a natural or synthetic, modified or unmodified nano-clay [ionic phyllosilicate] with a platelet thickness of less than 25 Å (~2.5 nm), more preferable less than 10 Å (~1 nm), and most preferably between 4-8 Å (~0.5-0.8 nm) and an aspect ratio (length/thickness) higher than 10, more preferably higher than 50 and most preferably higher than 100 or a mixture thereof or a nanocomposite formed from such a nanoclay or nano-clay mixture; preferably the nano-clay is a natural or modified bentonite, saponite, hectorite, montmorillonite or synthetic mica fluoride montmorillonite; and